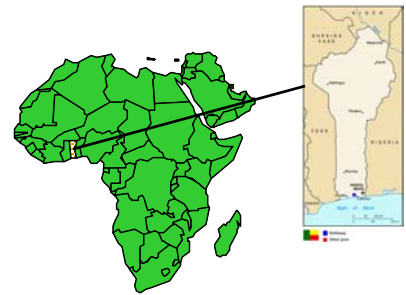




## DoD HIV/AIDS Prevention Program Status Report:

### Benin



## BACKGROUND

### Introduction/General Information

The population of Benin is estimated between 5.9 and 6.4 million people, with an average life expectancy of 50 years. French is the official language, and the in-country literacy rate is estimated at 37% for people over age 15. Benin's economy is concentrated primarily in agriculture (34%) and services (52%), with an annual per capita income ranging from \$380 to \$1,300.

### Country HIV/AIDS Statistics and Risk Factors

HIV/AIDS prevalence estimates for Benin range from 3.6 to 4.1%, with the number of adults believed to be living with HIV/AIDS ranging from 120,000 to 160,000; these cases are equally distributed between males and females. Identified significant risk factors include early initiation of sexual activity, significant poverty and illiteracy, gender status disparity, and lack of treatment and care for STIs. Eighty-two percent of HIV/AIDS infections in Benin occur through heterosexual contact.

### Military HIV/AIDS Information

The Benin Armed Forces (BAF) is estimated at 7,500 personnel. Because the BAF have not performed systematic screening of its personnel, accurate HIV prevalence statistics are not available. In an HIV/AIDS behavioral and belief survey administered to BAF personnel, 60% of the respondents indicated they were at high risk for infection.

## PROPOSED PROGRAM

In March 2001 Beninois Military Medicine submitted a plan titled *Project for the Prevention of HIV/AIDS Infection in the Armed Forces of Benin* to DHAPP staff. Specific objectives of this plan included:

- Improving care and counseling for troops with HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases,
- Increasing awareness among military personnel and prevention methods,
- Promoting safe sex behavior among military personnel,
- Providing formal training for counselors and educators,
- Implementing a behavioral change campaign,
- Instituting a mass awareness initiative with brochures, posters, other media, and testimonial accounts from people living with AIDS,
- Using dramas and plays, and
- Promoting the use of condoms.

The proposed training program includes train-the-trainer and peer educator components, together with clinical and counseling training for doctors and nurses at key military facilities throughout the country. Once the train-the-trainer and peer educator components are in place, the goal is to provide both commissioned and noncommissioned officers with comprehensive training on HIV/AIDS/STI transmission routes, coupled with information about high-risk behaviors for HIV infections and strategies to reduce personal vulnerability.

## PROGRAM RESPONSE

### Military-to-Military

In December 2000, DHAPP staff visited Cotonou, Benin, to conduct an in-county assessment of the BAF HIV prevention plan. DHAPP funded the following elements of the BAF plan: awareness raising and promotional activities; research; training; and internships for BAF personnel; transportation; computers; electronic, audiovisual, and laboratory equipment; and an AIDS Information and Prevention Center in Cotonou.



Benin Armed Forces leaders met to plan for an HIV/AIDS prevention campaign.

DHAPP provided computers and audiovisual equipment to support the HIV prevention efforts, and hired a foreign service national employee to coordinate efforts between DHAPP, US Embassy, and BAF staffs. In March 2003 DHAPP purchased an Enzyme-Linked Immunosorbent Assay (ELISA) machine and reagents to provide the BAF with an HIV diagnosis capability. US clinicians provided on-site training to BAF health workers in HIV testing protocols and operation of the ELISA equipment.

DHAPP conducted an HIV prevention awareness and education training session involving 300 Benin military personnel selected for a peacekeeping mission in Cote d'Ivoire. DHAPP purchased 4,000 boxes of

condoms for the peacekeepers and remaining forces.

DHAPP funds were also used to purchase 2 Land Cruisers and paid for the renovation of a military health services building for Benin's HIV/AIDS Prevention Program.



Benin health official accepted laboratory equipment and supplies, computers, and other support for the BAF HIV/AIDS Prevention Program.



DHAPP sponsored local language HIV/AIDS prevention guidelines for UN peacekeepers.

### Clinical Provider Training

DHAPP sponsored 3 physician coordinators for the Benin HIV/AIDS Prevention Program to attend the XIV International AIDS Conference in Barcelona, Spain. While there, DHAPP held a collaborative meeting with African partners and HIV specialists to

provide opportunities for consultation specific to the military forces. Additionally, DHAPP presented a 10-day training course for Benin military medical personnel covering HIV counseling and managing confidential information. This course prepared BAF staff for assignment to the HIV/AIDS Center of Information and Counseling.

### **Interoperability**

Initial surveillance was accomplished and substantive improvements made in the BAF prevention plan with the assistance of the UA Agency for International Development. DHAPP cooperated with international agencies and played a significant role in World AIDS Day events in Benin.



DHAPP sponsored a race to highlight World AIDS Day.



DHAPP sponsored training for HIV/AIDS prevention peer educators.

## **PROGRAM IMPACT**

### **Master Trainers and Peer Educators**

Master training programs recently began.

### **Number of Troops Trained**

The BAF HIV/AIDS prevention campaign reached more than 400 senior personnel and 1,500 troops. Additionally, 4 military nurses were trained in counseling and management of a Voluntary Counseling and Testing Center (VCT), and 30 officers were trained on the theme: *HIV/AIDS & [the] Benin Army*.



Peer educators were equipped with recognizable training kits.

### **Potential Number of Troops Affected**

The DHAPP sponsored programs reached 7,500 and will affect future recruits.

### **Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT)**

One VCT center is now open and fully staffed. DHAPP renovated a building to create a professional setting for troops to seek information, voluntary testing for HIV, and counseling about prevention.

### **Mass Awareness**

DHAPP sponsored 2 public awareness events for the BAF members who were deploying to the Ivory Coast. Additionally, 38 public awareness events were conducted in military camps throughout Benin.